

HUMILITY THE FRIEND OF PRAYER

NO. 1787

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 22, 1884,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shown unto thy servant;
for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands."
Genesis 32:10.*

JACOB'S character was far from faultless, but equally removed from despicable. He possessed great strength of character and force of judgment, and this became somewhat of a snare to him, so that he did not always move through life with the childlike repose of Isaac, or the royal serenity of Abraham, but was at times crafty and pettifogging, like his relatives on his mother's side. Yet I demur to that depreciation of Jacob's character which is so common in certain quarters, because he used the means, as well as prayed. Our God is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, *and of Jacob*, and very frequently He is called *the God of Israel*, and even *the God of Jacob*. "He is not ashamed to be called their God," and if He is not ashamed to be called Jacob's God, no fellow-believer has any right to be ashamed of Jacob. With all his imperfections—and he certainly had them—he was a noble man.

Some good people are built upon too small a scale to display either good or bad qualities in any high degree—let not such carp at a great man like Jacob. He has impressed his character upon multitudinous generations, and a whole nation bears his lineaments. He was a man full of energy, active, enduring, resolute, and hence his infirmities became more conspicuous than they would have been in a quieter and more restful nature.

Say what you will of him, he was a master of the art of prayer, and he that can pray well is a princely man. He that can prevail with God will certainly prevail with men. It seems to me that when once a man is taught of the Lord to pray he is equal to every emergency that can possibly arise. Depend upon it, it will go hard with any man who fights against a man of prayer. All other weapons may be dashed aside, but the weapon of All-prayer, invisible though it may be, and despised of the worldling, has in it a might and majesty which will secure the victory. The sword of prayer has such an edge that it will cut through coats of mail. Jacob was a prevailing prince when he came upon his knees.

Dr. Kitto, in his admirable Bible Illustrations, has a chapter upon this chapter which is entitled, "The First Prayer." I take leave to differ a little from that title. This can hardly be said to be the first prayer that is recorded in Scripture. I admit that the excellent writer excludes the prayer of Abraham for Sodom as rather an intercession than a prayer, but there are other prayers of Abraham, and other instances of supplication. Yet it may be truly said that this is the first prayer in the Bible of a man for himself, which is given at full length, and being the first, it may be viewed in some degree as a pattern for succeeding pleaders.

If you examine it carefully, you will find that it is a valuable model which may be copied by any child of God in the day of his trouble. Jacob begins by pleading the covenant—"O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac," what better plea can we have than the covenant of a faithful God, which He has already fulfilled to our fathers? He next pleads a special promise which had been made to himself. That promise was wrapped up in the folds of a precept which he was obeying, "Thou saidst unto me, return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." While we plead the general covenant made with all believers in Christ, we may also particularly and especially plead any promise which has been laid home to our own soul by the Spirit of the blessed God.

Next, he proceeded to plead his own unworthiness, by faith he turned even his faultiness into an argument, as I shall have to show you, “I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies.” Furthermore, he went on to plead with God, stating his special danger, “Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau.” He also set the little children and their danger before God—a strong plea with such a God of love as we have, “Lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.”

Then he concluded with what must always remain a potent plea with God, “Thou saidst.” He urged God’s promise, and virtually cried, “Do as thou hast said.” It is wise to spread the promise before Him who gave it, and to beg for its fulfillment. We may appeal to God’s faithfulness, and cry, “Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.”

The very first sentence of Jacob’s prayer has this peculiarity about it, that *it is steeped in humility*, for he does not address the Lord as his own God at the first, but as the God of Abraham and Isaac. The prayer itself, though it is very urgent, is never presumptuous, it is as lowly as it is earnest. I take it that even when Jacob in his desperation grasped the angel, and said, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me,” there was no undue familiarity in his holy boldness. There was an extraordinary courage, and an invincible determination, but it was of the kind which God approves, otherwise He would not have blessed him there. No man wins a blessing through a sinful act towards God. Throughout this prayer I see, with all its intensity, a loving remembrance of who Jacob is, and who JEHOVAH is, and the suppliant speaks in terms fit to be used towards the thrice holy God by a man of lowly heart.

This is to be the subject of our discourse—*humility is the fit attitude of prayer*. We will begin with that—“I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shown unto thy servant.” Then we will advance in the second place to remark that *humility is promoted by the same considerations which encourage prayer*—that I shall show you from the text, and thirdly, *humility suggests and supplies many arguments which can be used in prayer*. A proud man has few reasons to bring before God, but the humbler a man is, the more numerous are his prevailing pleas. Prayer is a suitable employment for a sinner, and a sinner is the best person to exercise prayer.

I. Our first observation is that HUMILITY IS THE FIT ATTITUDE OF PRAYER.

I do not think that Jacob could have prayed unless he had stripped off the robes of self-justification which he wore in his controversy with Laban, and had stood disrobed before the infinite majesty of the Most High.

Observe that he here speaks *not as before man, but as before God*, and he cries, “I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies.” He had been talking with Laban—Laban who had made a slave of him, who had used him in the most mercenary manner, and who had now pursued him in fierce anger because he had quitted his service with his wives and children that he might go back to his native country. To Laban he does not say, “I am not worthy of what I possess,” for, as far as churlish Laban was concerned, he was worthy of a great deal more than had ever been rendered to him in the form of wages. To Laban he uses many truthful sentences of self-vindication and justification.

Laban’s substance had greatly increased under Jacob’s unceasing care. He cared for Laban’s flocks with constant diligence, and he says, “In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.” He declares that he had never taken a ram of the flock wherewith to feed his own family, that he had, in fact, for many years worked with no wages except the daughters who became his wives, and he goes the length of saying, “Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty.”

The same man who speaks in that fashion to Laban turns round and confesses to his God, “I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies.” This is perfectly consistent and truthful. Humility is not telling falsehoods against yourself, humility is forming a right estimate of yourself. As towards Laban it was a correct estimate for a man who had worked so hard for so little to claim that he had a right to what God had given him, and yet as before God it was perfectly honest and sincere of Jacob to say, “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shown unto thy servant.”

Now, whenever you go to prayer, if you have previously been compelled to say some rather strong thing as to your own integrity and industry, or, if you have heard others speak in your praise, forget it all, for you cannot pray if it has any effect upon you. A man cannot pray with a good opinion of himself, all he can manage is just to mutter, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are," and that is no prayer at all. A lofty view of your own excellence will tempt you to look down with contempt upon your neighbor, and that is death to prayer. God drives out of His temple all proud prayers, He cannot endure such provocations.

You must put your shoe from off your foot when you stand on holy ground—that same shoe which it is quite right for you to wear when you have to tread upon the lion and the dragon—that same shoe which fits you well, and which it befits you to wear when traveling through this great and terrible wilderness. Put off before your God even that which you are forced to wear before churlish men.

When we see Jesus we say of Him, "whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." "Lord, I am not worthy," is our cry. Like Abraham, we acknowledge that we are but dust and ashes, less than the least of all saints, honored by being allowed to discharge any menial function in our Master's house. See, then, that it was essential for Jacob to get into his right attitude after having disputed with Laban. It was fit that in lifting his eyes to heaven he should use the lowliest language, and by no means pretend to any desert in the presence of the thrice Holy One.

Brethren, *it would ill become any of us to use the language of merit before God*, for merit we have none, and if we had any, we should not need to pray. It has been well observed by an old divine, that the man who pleads his own merit does not pray, but demands his due. If I ask a man to pay me a debt, I am not a suppliant, but a plaintiff claiming my rights. The prayer of a man who thinks he is meritorious is like serving the Lord with a writ, it is not offering a request; it is issuing a demand. Merit in effect says, "Pay me that thou owest." Little will such a man get of God, for if the Lord only pays to us what He owes us, yonder place of torment will be our speedy heritage.

If while living here we receive no more than we deserve, we shall be offcasts and outcasts. The lowest of mendicants obtain more than their deserts. Even life itself is a gift from the Creator, "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" Let us be brought low as we may, we still must own that "it is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not." Any other attitude but that of humility would be most unbecoming and presumptuous in the presence of the Most High.

Let me add, also, that *in times of great pressure upon the heart there is not much fear of self-righteousness intruding*. Jacob was greatly afraid and sorely distressed, and when a man is brought into such a state the lowliest language suits him. They that are filled with bread may boast, but the hungry beg. Let the proud take heed lest while the bread is yet in their mouths the wrath of God comes upon them. He that is brought to penury, he that is distressed in spirit, he that lies at death's door, is not a man to show the peacock's feathers and display his finery. Then he looks about him to the loving-kindness of the Lord, and he pleads for mercy. This is his one cry—"Mercy, mercy." He finds that he cannot pray until he has come to his true standing as an undeserving one, but having reached that he has a firm foothold, for he pleads the absolute sovereignty of divine grace, and the boundless love of the divine heart as substantial arguments for mercy.

I am persuaded that in our prayers we fail at times because we do not get low enough. On your face before the throne you shall prevail. If you have any righteousness of your own, you shall never have Christ's righteousness. If you have no sin, you shall have no washing in the precious blood. If you are strong, you shall be left to your own weakness. If you are rich and increased in goods, you shall be sent away empty. But when you can truly confess your nothingness, and lie low before God, He must hear you.

"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD." No prayers speed better in the heights than those which rise from the depths. When you are naked the Lord will clothe you, when you are hungry He will feed you, when you are nothing He will be your all in all, for then it is that He will win glory to

Himself, and His mercies will not be perverted to feed your pride. When our mercies magnify the Lord we shall have many of them, but when we use them for the magnifying of our own selves they will depart from us. See, then, dear friend, how necessary it is that we should approach the Lord in the attitude of humility.

I call your attention to the present tense as it is used in the text—Jacob does not say, as we might half have thought he would have said, “I *was* not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast made to pass before thy servant,” but he says “I *am not* worthy.” He does not merely allude to his unworthiness when he crossed this Jordan with a staff in his hand, a poor solitary banished man, he believes that he was unworthy then, but even now, looking upon his flocks and his herds and his great family, and all that he had done and suffered, he cries “I *am not* worthy!” What, has not all God’s mercy made you worthy?

Brethren, free grace is neither the child nor the father of human worthiness. If we get all the grace we ever can get we shall never be worthy of that grace, for grace as it enters where there is no worthiness, so it imparts to us no worthiness afterwards as we are judged before God. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, we have only done what it was our duty to have done. I cannot bear the man who, in his foolish prattle about his own perfection, talks as if he had become worthy of grace. The Lord have mercy upon such boasters, and bring them to the true moorings, so that they may own that they are not worthy.

When you and I shall get to heaven, though God may say, “They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy,” yet it will never be right for any one of us to say that we are worthy of anything that God has bestowed upon us. Our psalm must be *Non nobis Domine*—“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake.” To touch the praise which comes to us through the operations of divine grace, even with our little finger, were treason against the Most High. To assume for a moment that we deserve anything of the Lord God, is so vain-glorious, so false, so unjust that we ought to loathe the very thought of it, and cry like Jacob, “I am not worthy.”

Job, who had defended himself with vigor and possibly with bitterness, no sooner heard God speaking to him in the whirlwind than he cried, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Prostrate before the throne is the proper attitude of prayer, in humility is our strength for supplication.

II. Secondly, the same thought will be kept up, but put in a somewhat differing light, while we note that **THOSE CONSIDERATIONS WHICH MAKE TOWARDS HUMILITY ARE THE STRENGTH OF PRAYER.**

Observe, first, that Jacob in this prayer showed his humility by a *confession of the Lord’s working in all his prosperity*. He says with a full heart, “All the mercies, and all the truth, which thou hast shown unto thy servant.” Well, but Jacob, you have immense flocks of sheep, but you earned them, and through your care they greatly increased, do you not consider that those flocks are entirely your own procuring? Surely you must see that you were highly industrious, prudent, and careful, and thus grew wealthy? No, he takes a survey of his great estate, and he speaks of it all as *mercies*—mercies which the Lord had showed unto His servant.

I do not object to books about *self-made men*, but I am afraid that self-made men have a great tendency to worship him that made them. It is very natural they should. But, brethren, if we are self-made, I am sure we had a very bad maker, and there must be a great many flaws in us. It would be better to be ground back to dust again, and made over anew so as to become God-made man.

Listen, O proud self-made mortal! What if you have earned everything, who gave you strength to earn it? What if your success be due to your shrewd sense, who gave you skill and foresight? What if you have been frugal and industrious, yet why were you not left to be as prodigal as others, and to waste in riot what God bestowed on you? Oh, sir, if you are lifted an inch above the dunghill you should bless God for it, for it is from the dunghill you have come.

God helps His servants while they are weak, but when they fancy themselves strong, He frequently humbles them. When we cry, "Behold this great Babylon that I have builded," God may not cast us off, but He will cast us down. He did not cast off Nebuchadnezzar, but He did allow him to lose his reason and mingle with the beasts of the field. If we act brutishly, the Lord may allow us to become like beasts in other matters.

The use of our reasoning powers is a boon of heavenly charity which should lead us to deep gratitude, but never induce in us pride as to our superior abilities. If we are out of Bedlam we ought to bless the Lord in the humblest manner. Shall we dare to glory in our talents? Shall the axe boast against him that hews therewith? Shall the net exalt itself against the fisherman who drags the sea therewith? That were, indeed, a folly, a God-provoking folly. Inasmuch as God does so much for us, we ought to be humbled by the weight of obligation which love heaps upon us.

This may also yield us a hold upon God in prayer, for now we can say, "Lord, thou hast done all this for me, it is plain that thy hand has been in all thy servant's happiness, let thy hand be with me still." Oh, self-made man, when you have made yourself, can you keep yourself and preserve yourself in being? And do you hope to get to heaven and throw up your cap and say, "Hosanna to myself"? Do you reckon upon such vainglory? If you seek your own glory you shall find no place in that city where God's glory is the all-pervading bliss of the place. So, then, that which tends to keep us humble also becomes an assistance to us in our prayer.

The next point is *a consideration of Gods mercies*. For my part, nothing ever sinks me so low as the mercy of God, and next to that I am readily subdued by the kindness of men. When the clarion rings out for battle I will stand foot to foot with him that dare encounter me, and all the man within me is aroused to the conflict, but when all is peace and quiet, and everyone wishes me well, I wonder at their kindness, and I sink into my shoes with fear lest I should act in any way unworthily. The man who has a due sense of his own character will be laid low by words of commendation.

When we remember the loving-kindness of the Lord to us we cannot but contrast our littleness with the greatness of His love, and feel a sense of self-debasement. It is written, "They shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it." The words are true to the letter. Take a case, Peter went fishing, and if he had caught a few fish, his boat would have floated high on the lake, but when the Master came into the boat and told him where to throw the net so that he pulled up a multitude of fish, then the little barque began to sink. Down, down, it went, and poor Peter went down with it, till he fell at Jesus' feet and cried, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He was confused and overwhelmed, or he would never have asked the blessed Master to leave him, Christ's goodness had fairly beaten him till he was afraid of his Benefactor. Know you not what it is to be weighted down with infinite goodness, oppressed with mercy, swept away by an avalanche of love. I, at least, know what it means, and I know of no experience which has made me so little in my own eyes.

I feel less than the least of all His mercies, I shrink, and tremble in the presence of His bounty. If even providential goodness does this, you may be sure that redeeming love will be even more effectual. Here is a proud sinner, boasting of his own righteousness, you cannot get his self-glorying out of him, but by and by he learns that the Son of God gave His life to redeem him, poured out His heart upon Calvary's cross, the just for the unjust, to bring him to God, and now he is of another mind. No man could ever think that he deserved that the Son of God should die for him! If he does think so, he must be out of his mind.

Dying love touches the heart, and the man cries, "Lord, I am not worthy of a drop of thy precious blood, I am not worthy of a sigh from thy sacred heart, I am not worthy that You should have lived on earth for me, much less that You should have died for me." A sense of that wondrous condescension which is the highest commendation of God's love, that in due time Christ died for the ungodly, brings the man down upon his knees, dissolved by the mercies of God.

Now, if there is any man here who has a good hope through grace that by and by he will be with God in heaven, if he will meditate upon the beatific vision, if he will picture to himself the crown upon His head, and the palm branch in His hand, and himself enjoying the everlasting hallelujah,

*“Far from a world of grief and sin,
With God eternally shut in;”*

why, the next thing he will do is to sit down and weep that this can be possible to him. Such a poor, useless, sinful soul as I am, can I be glorified, and has Jesus gone to prepare a place for me? Does He give me His own assurance that He will come again, and receive me to Himself? Am I a joint heir with Christ, and a favored child of God? This makes us lose ourselves in adoring gratitude.

Oh, sirs, we can never open our mouth again in the way of boasting, our pride is drowned in this sea of mercy. If we had a little Savior, and a little heaven, and little mercy we might still hang out our flags, but with a great Savior, and great mercy, and a great heaven we can only go in like David, and sit before the Lord, and say, “Whence is this to me?” I have a dear brother in Christ, who is now sore sick, the Rev. Mr. Curme, the vicar of Sandford, in Oxfordshire, who has been my dear friend for many years. He is the mirror of humility, and he divides his name into two words, *Cur me?* which means, “Why me?” Often did he say, in my hearing, “Why me, Lord? Why me?” Truly I can say the same, *Cur me?*

*“Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
And enter where there’s room;
While thousands make a wretched choice
And rather starve than come?”*

This exceeding kindness of the Lord all tends to promote humility, and at the same time to help us in prayer, for if the Lord be so greatly good, we may adopt the language of the Phoenician woman when the Master said to her, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.” She answered, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” So we will go and ask our Lord to give us crumbs of mercy, and they will be enough for us poor dogs. God’s crumbs are bigger than man’s loaves, and if He gives us what to Him may be a crumb, it shall be a meal to us. Oh, He is a great Giver! He is a glorious Giver! We are not equal to His least gift! We cannot estimate His least mercy, nor describe it fully, nor praise Him for it sufficiently. His shallows are too deep for us, His mole-hill mercies overtop us, what shall we say of His mountain mercies?

Again, *a comparison of our past and our present* will tend to humility and also to helpfulness in prayer. Jacob at first is described thus, “With my staff I passed over this Jordan.” He is all alone, no servant attends him, he has no goods, not even a change of linen in a parcel, nothing but a staff to walk with, now, after a few years, here is Jacob coming back, crossing the river in the opposite direction, and he has with him two bands. He is a large grazier, with great wealth in all manner of cattle. What a change! I would have those men whom God has prospered never to be ashamed of what they used to be, they ought never to forget the staff with which they crossed this Jordan.

I had a good friend who preserved the axle-tree of the truck in which he wheeled home his goods when he first came to London. It was placed over his front door, and he never blushed to tell how he came up from the country, worked hard, and made his way in the world. I like this a deal better than the affected gentility which forgets the lone half-crown which pined in solitude in their pockets when they entered this city. They are indignant if you remind them of their poor old father in the country, for they have discovered that the family is very ancient and honorable, in fact, one of their ancestors came over with the Conqueror. I have never felt any wish to be related to that set of vagabonds, but tastes differ, and there are some who think that they must be superior beings because they are descended from Norman freebooters. Nobodies suddenly swell as if they were everybody.

Observe that Jacob does not say, “Years ago I was at home with my father Isaac, a man of large estate.” Nor does he talk of his grandfather Abraham as a nobleman of an ancient family in Ur, of the Chaldees, who was entertained by monarchs. No, he was not so silly as to boast of aristocracy and wealth, but he frankly owns his early poverty—“With my staff, a poor, lonely, friendless man, I crossed this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.” It humbles him to think of what he was, but at the same time it strengthens him in prayer, for in effect he pleads, “Lord, have You made two bands of me that Esau may have the more to destroy? Have You given me these children that they may fall by the sword?” So again I say, that which humbled also encouraged him, he found his strength in prayer in those very things which furnished motives for lowliness.

III. And now, as time flies, we must dwell upon the third point, still hammering the same nail on the head, TRUE HUMILITY SUPPLIES US WITH ARGUMENTS IN PRAYER.

Look at the first one, “*I am not worthy* of all thy mercies,” nay, “I am not worthy of the least of all the many mercies which thou hast shown unto thy servant. Thou hast kept thy word and been true to me, but it was not because I was true to thee. I am not worthy of the truth which thou hast shown unto thy servant.” Is there not power in such a prayer? Is not mercy secured by a confession of unworthiness? The man whom Christ most of all commended, as far as I remember, was he who used this very language. The centurion came to Christ and said, “Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof,” yet this was he of whom the Lord said, “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.” Depend on it, if you want Christ’s commendation you must be lowly in your own esteem, for He never praises the proud, but He honors the humble.

Since the Lord was thus gracious to him when he was unworthy, had not Jacob splendid ground to stand upon while he wrestled with God, and cried, “Deliver me from Esau, my brother, though because of the wrong I did him I am not worthy of such deliverance”? We are always afraid in our time of trouble that God will deal with us according to our unworthiness, but He will not. We say to ourselves, “At last the sins of my youth have come home to me, now I shall be dealt with according to my iniquities!” But Jacob virtually said, “Lord, I never was worthy of the least thing that You have done for me, and all Your dealings to me are in pure grace. I stand still where I always must stand, a debtor to Your sovereign undeserved favor, and I appeal to You—since You have done all this for me, an undeserving one, I beseech You, do yet more. I have not changed, for I am as undeserving as ever, and You have not changed, for You are as good as ever, therefore still deliver Your servant.” This is mighty pleading with the Most High.

Then please to notice that while Jacob thus pleads his own unworthiness he is not slow to plead *God’s goodness*. He speaks in most expressive words, wide and full of meaning. “I am not worthy of the least of *all thy mercies*. I cannot enumerate them, the list would be too long! It seems to me as if You have given me all kinds of mercies, every sort of blessing. Your mercy endures forever, and You have given it all to me.” How he extols God as with a full mouth when he says, “All thy mercies.” He does not say, “All thy mercy”—the word is in the plural—“the least of all thy *mercies*.” For God has many bands of mercies, favors never come alone, they visit us in troops. All the trees in God’s vineyard are full of boughs, and each branch is loaded with fruit. All the flowers in God’s garden bloom double, and some of them bloom sevenfold.

We have not mercy only, but mercies numerous as the sand. Mercy for the past, the present, the future, mercy to temper sorrows, mercy to purify joys, mercy for our sinful things, mercy for our holy things. “All thy mercies,” the expression has a vast acreage of meaning. He does not know how to express his sense of obligation except with plurals and universals, the language is so full I could never exhibit all its meaning. He seems to say to the Lord, “Because of all this great goodness, I pray You go on to deal well with Your servant. Save me from Esau, or all Your mercies will be lost. Have You not in Your past love, given pledge to me to keep me even to the end?”

Mercy and truth all through the Bible are continually joined together, “All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth.” “God shall send forth his mercy and his truth.” These two gracious ones grasp hands in Jacob’s prayer—“All thy mercies and all thy truth.”

Oh, brethren, if you would wrestle with God and prevail, use much these two master arguments, mercies and truth. These are two keys which will open all the treasures of God, these are two shields behind which you will be out of reach of every fiery arrow. That which made Jacob humble, also made him strong in prayer. Gratitude for mercy made him bow before God, but it also enabled him to grasp the angel with the hand of believing importunity.

Notice, next, how he says “*Thy servant.*” A plea is hidden away in that word. Jacob might have called himself by some other name on this occasion. He might have said, “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou have shown unto thy *child*,” it would have been true, it would not have been fitting. Suppose it had run—“Unto thy *chosen*,” it would have been true, but not so lowly, or “unto thy *covenanted one*”—that would have been correct, but not so humble an expression as Jacob felt bound to use in this time of his distress, when the sins of his youth were brought to his mind.

He seemed to say, “Lord, I am Your servant. You did bid me come hither, and hither I have come because of that bidding, therefore protect me.” Surely a king will not see his servant put upon when engaged in the royal service. Jacob was in the path of duty, and God would make it the path of safety. If we make God our guide, He will be our guard. If He be our Commander He will be our Defender. He will not permit any Esau to smite with the sword one of His Jacobs. When we fully cast ourselves upon the Lord by a believing obedience, we may depend upon it that He will bear us up and bear us through. Masters are commanded to give unto their servants that which is just and equal, and we may be sure that our Master in heaven will do the same to each of us who serve Him.

Jacob was in danger through His service, and therefore the Lord’s honor was pledged to see him through. It may seem a small thing to be a servant, but it is a great thing to plead in the hour of need, so David used it, “Make thy face to shine upon thy servant.” “Hide not thy face from thy servant; for I am in trouble.” “O, thou my God, save thy servant that trusts in thee.” These are but specimens of the ways in which men of God used their position as servants as an argument for mercy.

Jacob had yet another plea which showed his humility, and that was *the argument of facts*. “With my staff,” he says, “I passed over this Jordan,” “This Jordan,” which flowed hard by, and received the Jabbok. It brings a thousand things to his mind, to be on the old spot again. When he crossed it before he was journeying into exile, but now he is coming back as a son, to take his place with loved Rebekah and father Isaac, and he could not but feel it a great mercy that he was now going in a happier direction than before.

He looked at his staff, and he remembered how in fear and trembling he had leaned upon it as he pursued his hasty, lonely march. “With this staff—that is all I had.” He looks upon it, and contrasts his present condition and his two camps with that day of poverty, that hour of hasty flight. This retrospect humbled him, but it must have been strength to him in prayer. “O God, if You have helped me from abject want to all this wealth, You can certainly preserve me in the present danger. He who has done so much is still able to bless me, and He will do so.”

*“Can He have taught me to trust in His name,
And thus far have brought me to bring me to shame?”*

Does God mock men? Does He encourage their hope and then leave them? No, the God that begins to bless perseveres in blessing, and even to the end continues to love His chosen.

In closing, I think I discover one powerful argument here in Jacob’s prayer. Did he not mean that although God had increased him so greatly, there had come with it *all the greater responsibility*? He had more to care for than when he owned less. Duty had increased with increased possessions. He seems to say, “Lord, when I came this way before I had nothing, only a staff, that was all I had to take care of,

and if I had lost that staff I could have found another. Then I had Your dear and kind protection, which was better to me than riches. Shall I not have it still? When I was a single man with a staff You did guard me, and now that I am surrounded by this numerous family of little children and servants, will You not spread Your wings over me? Lord, the gifts of Your goodness increase my necessity, give me proportionately Your blessing. I could before run away and escape from my angry brother, but now the mothers and the children bind me, and I must abide with them and die with them unless You preserve me.”

My brethren, at this hour I know how to use this selfsame plea. To me every advance in position among men means more obligations to serve my Lord and bless my generation. I need more grace, or my failure will be the more shameful. Unworthy as we are of all this blessing, yet we dare not trifle with it, and refuse to serve our God with all our powers. The more oxen the more ploughing has to be done, the broader the fields the more laboriously must we sow, the larger the harvest the more industriously must we reap, for all this we need much more strength.

If God blesses and increases us in talent, or in substance, or in any way, ought we not to conclude that the larger trust involves greater responsibility? Thus our life’s task grows sterner, and more difficult, and we are driven more than ever to our God. This is our argument—“O Lord, You have imposed upon me a wider service, give me more grace. In Your goodness You have committed more talents to him that had ten talents, will You not give more help to put all out to interest for Your name’s sake?”

Yes, brother, as God uplifts you, take care that you bow lower and lower at His feet. Consecrate even more entirely your whole being unto God. Be thankful if your pound has gained one pound, and if He does more for you, be restless till His five pounds have gained five more pounds. Let the goodness of God, instead of becoming a cloak for your pride, or a couch for your sloth, be an incentive to your industry, a stimulus to your zeal. May it help your humility, but at the same time encourage your confidence when you draw near to God in prayer, to feel how largely you are under obligations to serve the Lord.

Come, dear friends, the Lord has been mindful of us as a church, and He will bless us. We have obtained, through our Lord Jesus and His Spirit, blessings so large that I can say in your name, we are not worthy of the least of all these mercies. Shall we not use them to God’s glory? Yes, more than ever, for we are determined to pray more, and to believe more, and to work more, and to be more full of courage and dauntless resolve that the name and the truth of Jesus shall be made known wherever our voice can be heard. As long as tongues can speak and hearts can beat, God helping us, we will live for Jesus our Lord. We are what Rutherford would call, “drowned debtors,” let us be living lovers. Our ships have gone down in a sea of love till mercy rolls over our topmasts. So be it. So be it. We are swallowed up in an abyss of love. My figure describes us as sinking, but in very truth it is thus we rise by being filled with all the fullness of God. With a full heart I pray for you, beloved. God bless you, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—GENESIS 32

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—PSALM 103 (VERSION 2), 705, 214

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